

Inattentive Drivers!

By John Johnston

The number of fatal automobile crashes in the Marine Corps increased dramatically in FY02, compared to FY01. Statistics indicate that 62 Marines died from private automobile crashes in FY02, compared to 25 in FY01.

Marine Corps Fatal Factors in FY99-FY01 showed 145 Marines died in their vehicles. Victims in these mishaps fell in the following percentages and categories:

- 53% Happened on Weekends
- 66% Happened at Night
- 47% Did Not Wear a Seatbelt
- 41% Involved Speeding
- 32% Involved Alcohol
- 21% Indicated Fatigue

Adding to the growing concern of today's Marine Corps is driver distraction, which new technological advances in communication have created. Besides the distractions of children chat-

tering, adults talking, and the driver inserting a CD or changing the radio station we now have people dialing or answering cell phones and looking at stock quotes or the latest ballgame score on palm pilots while driving.

A report by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration indicates that inattention causes 68 percent of rearend crashes. Other kinds of crashes (that occur while backing up, changing lanes, or merging) usually are caused by a driver not recognizing an obstacle or not paying attention. DoD Instruction 6055.4 (Traffic Safety Program) states that the potential for driver distraction increases when operating modern communication and navigational devices, such as cell phones or global positioning devices. Whenever possible, use these devices only when the vehicle is stopped.

Though once considered a luxury, cellular phones have become a common possession over the last decade. The advances in wireless technology and immense public demand have made these devices affordable to most consumers. It is esti-



driving should be the one and only task for people behind the wheel.


With the many distractions already in a car, a cell phone just adds to the clamor for a driver's attention. According to one state trooper, drivers have to decide what is more important when driving their vehicles: answering the phone, correcting children, talking to other occupants, picking up an object off the floor, working on a laptop computer, or paying attention to driving.

Failure to pay attention when driving is a growing problem—one that's killing a lot of people, including our Marines.

mated that 44 percent of all U.S. motorists have a cell phone in the vehicle. Studies indicate drivers involved in crashes due to inattention did not show any conclusive evidence that it was directly related to the use of the cell phones. Conversely, a study done in 1996 by Rochester Institute of Technology suggested that people who use cell phones while driving have a 34 percent higher risk of having a crash. This figure would suggest that

When Driving, Do You Ever?

- ☐ Tune the radio
- ☐ Eat, drink or smoke
- ☐ Pick up something up from the floor or from between the seats
- ☐ Read or write
- ☐ Reach for a glove compartment
- ☐ Talk on a cell phone
- ☐ Clean the inside of the windshield
- ☐ Argue with another passenger
- ☐ Comb or brush your hair
- ☐ Break up fights between your children
- ☐ Apply makeup
- ☐ Put in contact lenses or use eye drops
- ☐ Shave
- ☐ File, clip or polish your nails

If you answered yes to any of these items, you are a high-risk candidate for a crash. Even if you answered no to most, if not all, of these questions, you're still at risk from the other drivers around you who answered yes. Drive as though your life depends on it. Pay attention, or pay the price! 



Can you find the driver of this car?